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Review of the implementation of the agreed conclusions from the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report reviews and assesses the extent to which Member States have implemented the agreed conclusions from the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women on the challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. The report summarizes the progress, gaps and challenges relating to action taken at the national level in implementing the agreed conclusions. The current review takes place subsequent to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is in the early stages of implementation. Accordingly, the focus of the review is on action taken to transition to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

* E/CN.6/2017/1.



I. Introduction

1. At the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Member States agreed on new working methods for the Commission (see Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/6), which included a more rigorous review of the agreed conclusions relating to a priority theme from a previous session in order to encourage the implementation of its outcomes. As part of the review process, the Commission will consider a report on progress made on the theme at the national level.

2. The review theme of the Commission on the Status of Women at its sixty-first session, in 2017, is “Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls”. In accordance with its multi-year programme of work for 2010-2014, the Commission had adopted agreed conclusions on that theme at its fifty-eighth session, in 2014 (see [E/2014/27-E/CN.6/2014/15](#), chap. I, sect. A).

3. The review of the implementation of the agreed conclusions is taking place at a time when the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals is in the early stages. Given its timing, in addition to assessing the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, the focus of the review is on action taken by Member States to transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals. In this regard, the agreed conclusions of the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which provide guidance on the gender-responsive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, serve as reference (see [E/2016/27-E/CN.6/2016/22](#), chap. I, sect. A).

4. The report summarizes the progress, gaps and challenges relating to the implementation of the agreed conclusions at the national level. It also identifies ways to support and achieve their accelerated implementation. The current report will be accompanied by presentations by Member States, on a voluntary basis, of lessons learned, challenges and best practices, at the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

5. The report draws on information received from Member States¹ and other sources, including the report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals ([E/2016/75](#)) and voluntary reviews submitted as part of the high-level political forum convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council in 2016, final national and global reports on the Millennium Development Goals and national reports as part of the twentieth anniversary review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.²

¹ Albania, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, China, Colombia, Cuba, Djibouti, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Lithuania, Mexico, Nepal, Norway, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo and Turkmenistan.

² Available from www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw59-2015/preparations.

II. Influence and impact of the agreed conclusions on the global normative framework

6. The agreed conclusions of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women have had a significant influence and impact on the global normative framework, in particular on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1). The agreed conclusions reinforced the important linkages between the Millennium Development Goals, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In addition, the text makes a clear and strong relationship between development and the human rights of women and girls. Reflecting this, the 2030 Agenda is firmly grounded in human rights and positions the Beijing Platform for Action as a foundational framework for sustainable development.

7. Another major element of the agreed conclusions was its call for a transformative and comprehensive stand-alone goal on gender equality, women's empowerment and the human rights of women and girls, and for gender equality to be mainstreamed throughout all other goals. In the 2030 Agenda, the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment is recognized as "a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets", with a strong stand-alone goal (Goal 5), accompanied by gender-specific targets and indicators across other goals.

8. The agreed conclusions identified critical gender equality issues that were insufficiently addressed in the Millennium Development Goals, signalling priorities for the Sustainable Development Goals. The Commission recognized that progress on the Millennium Development Goals had been limited for women and girls owing to the lack of systematic gender mainstreaming and integration of a gender perspective in the design of the Millennium Development Goals. Compared to the Millennium Development Goals, the Sustainable Development Goals reflect a far more comprehensive set of commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

9. Goal 5 has nine targets that address many of the issues identified in the agreed conclusions, including discrimination, violence, harmful practices, unpaid care and domestic work, participation in decision-making, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, and rights to economic resources. Examples of gender equality priorities across other goals include access to social protection (Goal 1), addressing the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women (Goal 2), universal health coverage (Goal 3), access to quality education (Goal 4), access to water and sanitation (Goal 6), access to decent work and addressing the gender pay gap (Goal 8), reducing inequalities of outcome (Goal 10), safe public spaces (Goal 11) and inclusive decision-making at all levels (Goal 16).

10. In addition to the gender-specific commitments, the agreed conclusions made further normative advances that are also important elements of the 2030 Agenda. In the agreed conclusions, the Commission noted the universal context of gender equality and recognized that no country had achieved equality for women and girls. In contrast to the Millennium Development Goals, which were an agenda for developing countries, the 2030 Agenda is a universal agenda recognizing the global and interconnected nature of challenges to sustainable development, including

gender inequality. Further, in the agreed conclusions, the Commission expressed concern about the lack of progress for women and girls who experience multiple forms of discrimination and inequality. While the Millennium Development Goals were focused on national averages, which often hid inequalities, the 2030 Agenda commits to “leave no one behind”, requiring a much deeper analysis of the multiple drivers of inequalities.

11. The agreed conclusions recognize the important contributions made by women’s organizations and feminist groups in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women. In the actions focused on participation and accountability, the Commission called for the views of women’s organizations to be taken into account in the design of the 2030 Agenda. Looking ahead, the 2030 Agenda places emphasis on open, transparent and participatory processes to oversee the implementation, follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals. This is important, from a gender perspective, in order to ensure the strategic priorities and concerns of women influence decision-making.

12. The actions of the agreed conclusions to strengthen the evidence base have underpinned the global call to increase the production, availability and use of gender statistics. An innovative feature of the agreed conclusions was the call for standards and methodologies to be developed in several areas, including data on women’s poverty, income distribution within households, unpaid care work, women’s access to, control and ownership of assets and productive resources, and women’s participation at all levels of decision-making. Those areas are now visible priorities in the global work on gender statistics at the United Nations, particularly in the context of monitoring progress on the Sustainable Development Goals.³

III. Context for the implementation of the agreed conclusions

13. The agreed conclusions of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women assessed progress for each Millennium Development Goal from a gender perspective. The Commission noted that while there was progress in some areas of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls, for example in the area of gender parity in education, progress on several Millennium Development Goal targets that are important for gender equality and the empowerment of women was particularly slow, including in increasing women’s access to decent work, increasing women’s representation in decision-making, reducing maternal mortality and ensuring universal reproductive health and access to sanitation.

14. Subsequent reviews have further confirmed those deeply entrenched gender inequalities, across all countries. The 20-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (see [E/CN.6/2015/3](#) and [E/2015/27-E/CN.6/2015/10](#)) in 2015 found that overall progress towards gender equality has been unacceptably slow, with stagnation and even regression in some areas. For example, women’s increasing educational attainment and rising participation in the labour market have not been matched with better conditions of work, prospects for advancement and equal pay, and women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid care work. Globally, women are paid

³ UN-Women, *Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (forthcoming).

24 per cent less than men and women do nearly two and half times more unpaid care and domestic work as men.⁴

15. Assessing the current state of play based on available data, the first report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (E/2016/75) emphasized the global nature of gender inequalities across many domains. For example, in 2013, there were still 757 million adults (aged 15 and over) unable to read and write, of whom two thirds were women. Despite social protection being essential for reducing inequalities and vulnerability, particularly for women, most poor people remain outside social protection systems, particularly in poorer countries.

16. The same report also highlighted unfinished business from the Millennium Development Goals. Between 1990 and 2015, the global maternal mortality ratio declined by 44 per cent, to an estimated 216 deaths per 100,000 live births, falling short of the Millennium Development Goal target and far from the target of 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births established in the Sustainable Development Goals. Violence against women and harmful practices are new areas monitored by the Sustainable Development Goals. Rates of child marriage have declined overall but remain at unacceptable levels, especially in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Violence against women persists at alarmingly high levels across the world.⁵

17. Also in the same report, it was noted that women's participation in decision-making is increasing, albeit at a glacial pace. The proportion of seats held by women in single or lower houses of parliament rose to nearly 23 per cent in 2016. This represents an average increase of 0.6 percentage points a year since 2006 and a rise of 6 percentage points over a decade (see E/2016/75, para. 45).

18. Persistent and new challenges have affected the implementation of the agreed conclusions. The Commission expressed concern about the ongoing impacts of the economic crisis, of climate change and natural disasters. Three years later, the continuing impacts of the crisis are evident in high levels of youth unemployment, stagnation in female employment in most regions, with the exception of Latin America, pervasive informality of women's work in developing regions⁶ and the increasing precariousness of work worldwide. Based on projections by the International Monetary Fund, a second major period of expenditure contraction was predicted in 2016, following the first one in 2010, and expected to have an impact on 132 countries, with developing countries expected to be the most severely

⁴ UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights* (New York, 2015).

⁵ World Health Organization, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and South African Medical Research Council, *Global and Regional Estimates of Violence against Women: Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-Partner Sexual Violence* (Geneva, World Health Organization, 2013).

⁶ See International Labour Organization (ILO), *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2015: Scaling Up Investments in Decent Jobs for Youth* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2015); see also ILO and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing, *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture*, 2nd ed. (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2013).

affected.⁷ Such austerity measures set a challenging economic context for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

19. The past year has also been marked by increased conflict, mass displacement of populations and related humanitarian catastrophes. Global forced displacement is at record numbers. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that 65.3 million people were displaced at the end of 2015, compared to 59.5 million just 12 months earlier.⁸ At the same time, global military expenditure was \$1,776 billion in 2014, which affects the resources available for sustainable development.⁹

20. Against this background, the action areas of the agreed conclusions of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women remain highly relevant for transitioning to the Sustainable Development Goals. The next chapter assesses the action taken by Member States.

IV. National implementation efforts

21. Since the adoption of the agreed conclusions in 2014, Member States have moved to the preparatory stages of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. At this early stage, it is useful to examine how the lessons from the Millennium Development Goals are being reflected in the transition to the Sustainable Development Goals. Like the Millennium Development Goals, the Sustainable Development Goals are intended to be implemented primarily at the national level. Translating these commitments into results for women and girls will require a diverse range of policies and interventions, as well as regular and in-depth monitoring of progress in implementation efforts.

22. Overall, the responses from Member States for the present review indicate a varied approach to the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals. Several countries emphasize the Sustainable Development Goals as a priority at the national level (Argentina, Colombia, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Kenya, Mexico, Nepal, Russian Federation, Sweden, Turkmenistan) and have outlined their initial approaches for adapting their national policies and frameworks to the 2030 Agenda. Some countries reaffirmed the importance of integrating gender equality across the three dimensions of sustainable development. Developed countries (Australia, Austria, Finland, Japan, Norway, Sweden) are placing an emphasis on the gender equality commitments in the Sustainable Development Goals in their development cooperation efforts. Both developed and developing countries have provided good practice examples of policy implementation to realize women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights, strengthen the enabling environment, maximize investments in gender equality, strengthen the evidence base and ensure women's participation.

⁷ Isabel Ortiz and others, "The decade of adjustment: a review of austerity trends 2010-2020 in 187 countries", Extension of Social Security Working Paper, No. 53 (Geneva, International Labour Office; New York, Columbia University; Geneva, The South Centre, 2015).

⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015* (Geneva, 2016).

⁹ Data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, available from <https://sipri.org/databases/milex> (accessed 27 October 2016).

A. Realizing women's and girls' full enjoyment of all human rights

23. The agreed conclusions set out actions necessary to realize women's and girls' full enjoyment of all human rights. The Commission calls for the full implementation of existing international commitments and outlines important actions to address the multiple and intersecting factors contributing to women's and girls' poverty, to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, to ensure the promotion and protection of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work, and to promote rights to education and work. That section of the conclusions also highlights action to benefit particular groups of women and girls.

24. Ensuring the full realization of women's and girls' human rights is vital to achieving progress across the Sustainable Development Goals. When policies and programmes are divorced from human rights and instead focus on basic needs or achieving numerical targets, they can lead to unintended consequences that undermine the overall objective of the policy or goal. One example is the focus on skilled birth attendants in efforts to reduce maternal mortality, rather than a more comprehensive approach to women's sexual and reproductive health and rights that addresses the structural drivers of maternal mortality such as child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, adolescent pregnancy and the lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services and information. A further example is the focus on gender parity in education at the expense of attention to the quality of education or girls' safety in the school environment.

25. A comprehensive approach to fulfilling women's and girls' human rights also recognizes the synergies and interdependence between rights. For example, the realization of one right, such as women's right to work, can facilitate the realization of others, such as the right to an adequate standard of living. Conversely, the denial of rights in one area, such as a lack of access to safe and hygienic sanitation, can have an impact upon the enjoyment of other rights, such as the right to health and freedom from violence. Adopting a comprehensive approach to gender equality, grounded in international norms and standards, is particularly important for the wide-ranging 2030 Agenda to maximize the synergies between gender equality and women's empowerment and all the goals.

26. As part of their implementation efforts, Member States are aligning their national gender equality policy frameworks based on the Beijing Platform for Action with the Sustainable Development Goals (as reported by Colombia, Cuba, Greece, the Russian Federation and Sri Lanka), but there is not sufficient evidence that this is a practice across the board. While Goal 5 has been specifically referred to by Member States in the alignment of their national gender equality frameworks, other Sustainable Development Goals have received limited attention.

27. The importance of the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was also noted, by Argentina, Colombia, Cuba and Turkmenistan. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Italy also cited their efforts to implement regional instruments, such as the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Recognizing the centrality of peace to sustainable development, several countries have reviewed and developed new approaches to implement Security

Council resolution 1325 (2000) (Georgia, Italy, Japan and Sweden). One innovative approach, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is the implementation of action plans on resolution 1325 (2000) at the local and provincial levels with a focus on human security, rather than the more militarized concept of national security.

28. Legal and constitutional frameworks that guarantee and accelerate progress towards gender equality, along with measures to ensure women's access to justice, are the foundation upon which women's and girls' human rights can be realized. The outcome of the five-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (see General Assembly resolution S-23/3 established 2005 as a target date for the revocation of laws that discriminate against women. Since that deadline has long passed, the Sustainable Development Goals target (5.1) to end all forms of discrimination against all women takes on even greater urgency. Legal reform, to both promote gender equality and remove discrimination, has been a priority for Member States since the adoption of the agreed conclusions. Removing discrimination has been a focus for some countries (Djibouti, the Philippines, Qatar and Togo) in recent years. Areas of reform include laws around marriage, divorce, guardianship, citizenship, inheritance and driving.

29. Introducing or reforming laws on violence against women features strongly in Member States' responses (Albania, Argentina, Azerbaijan, China, Djibouti, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jamaica, Nepal, Paraguay, Peru and Spain). Violence against women is an area that was neglected in the Millennium Development Goals but is addressed in targets of Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 16. Legal reforms in this area include the introduction of new laws that address violence against women in a comprehensive manner in order to criminalize specific forms of violence, namely, domestic violence and sexual harassment, to reform laws to expand or refine the definition of domestic violence or rape, including criminalizing marital rape, and to create state obligations through law to provide services to survivors or to implement programmes to prevent violence before it happens.

30. Another area of law reform is in relation to women's labour rights and economic rights. Several countries have introduced reforms or are considering reforms to improve women's economic rights, including by improving general labour rights and conditions (Argentina and Colombia), outlawing discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sex, pregnancy and marital status (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cuba and Djibouti), enshrining equal pay in law (Colombia and Lithuania) and enhancing maternity leave provisions (Peru and the Philippines). National legal reform efforts to advance women's economic rights could be strengthened by improving minimum wage legislation, promoting women's right to collective bargaining and removing discriminatory provisions to ensure women's equal access to and control over economic resources.

31. Some countries have strengthened or introduced anti-discrimination or gender equality legislation. The introduction of positive duties or obligations (Finland, Lithuania and Norway) in law which create an obligation for governments to take proactive measures to achieve gender equality is a promising practice. Further, legal reforms to expand the definition of discrimination and equality to reflect the concept of substantive equality, or equality of outcomes, are also taking place (Turkmenistan). Some countries have focused on legal and policy measures to address multiple forms of discrimination experienced by specific groups of women,

including women with disabilities (Jamaica), indigenous women (Australia and Paraguay), migrant and displaced women (Georgia and Lithuania), Roma women (Albania and Italy), dalit women (Nepal), widows (Kenya), and women who experience discrimination owing to their sexual orientation and gender identity (Albania, Argentina, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Georgia, Peru and the Philippines). The efforts to respond to multiple forms of discrimination are promising, however there is little information on their effectiveness or results.

32. In addition to laws, countries are implementing a broad range of gender equality policies for women's empowerment and to realize the human rights of women and girls. Several countries report reviewing or developing new national action plans or national programmes on gender equality (Burkina Faso, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Poland, the Russian Federation and Switzerland). More specific policies address issues including gender and health (Kenya), violence against women (Austria, Burkina Faso, Djibouti and Lithuania), economic empowerment (China and Poland), trafficking (Spain), sexual and reproductive health and rights (Finland and Switzerland), unpaid care work (Finland, Sweden and Switzerland) and women's access to social protection (Nepal and Senegal). Member State responses indicate that efforts in certain countries are well under way for adapting the Sustainable Development Goals to their national contexts and pursuing their priorities.

B. Strengthening the enabling environment for gender equality and the empowerment of women

33. The agreed conclusions address factors and conditions in the broader environment that have an influence on gender equality. Provisions are included with regard to ensuring systematic gender mainstreaming across social, economic and environmental policies and actions to ensure that global trade, financial and investment agreements and macroeconomic policies promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. Actions called for include the integration of a gender perspective in response to climate change and for women's participation in all aspects of peacebuilding. Actions in support of women in trade, rural women in agriculture and in regard to the role of the media are also included in that section of the conclusions.

34. Systematic gender mainstreaming across the full range of policy areas is vital to ensure that all policy areas contribute to achieving gender equality. This is a particularly pressing concern in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, where nearly all 17 goals have important gender dimensions. In the responses from countries, gender mainstreaming emerges as a key priority for ensuring that gender equality is addressed across a broad range of policy areas. This includes embedding gender equality as a cross-cutting priority in national sustainable development plans (Mexico, Paraguay and Qatar) and making gender mainstreaming a central strategy of gender and development policy (Kenya). Some countries require all government departments to assess the impacts of their policies and programmes on gender equality (Finland and Sweden) and others have appointed gender focal points across government agencies (Jamaica and Paraguay) and set up inter-agency task forces on

gender equality issues (Georgia). There was limited information on the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming strategies or their reach across the 17 goals.

35. National gender equality mechanisms can play a catalytic role in gender mainstreaming by holding other government bodies to account for achieving gender equality commitments. However, the 20-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action found that many national gender equality machineries do not have the authority, the position within the administration or adequate levels of resources to be able to fulfil their essential functions. Some countries have reviewed and strengthened the mandate of their national gender equality machineries in the light of the Sustainable Development Goals (Australia and the Philippines) and others have expanded their institutional frameworks for gender equality by creating gender equality mechanisms at the local level (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Nepal). Other strategies to strengthen gender mainstreaming at the local level include localized gender equality action plans (Georgia) and provincial gender equality assessments (China).

36. Trade regimes can have an influence on gender equality and the empowerment of women. For example, over the past few decades, increasing numbers of women in developing countries have been employed in assembly manufacturing in export processing zones, areas in which labour and environmental standards may not apply in full or may remain unenforced, leaving women vulnerable to poor working conditions.¹⁰ Gender-sensitive trade and employment policies play an important role in reducing the risks and vulnerabilities to which women and girls are exposed and to generate decent work. Only Jamaica reported specifically on national efforts to address gender equality in its trade policy. Some countries have focused on measures to increase women's participation in entrepreneurship (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Italy) as a strategy to strengthen the enabling environment for gender equality. Others have focused on specific strategies such as increasing women's access to technology (China), providing microfinance (Mexico) and focusing on key sectors such as agriculture (Togo).

37. Dominant approaches to macroeconomic policy often focus on raising the level of gross domestic product (GDP) as their primary policy goal. Alternative approaches emphasize well-being, human rights or human development as the objective of economic policies. The 20-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action found that economic policies have either undermined women's social gains, as in the case of austerity measures that threaten to roll back some of the social policy measures that have strengthened women's rights, or failed to support them through access to decent work (see [E/CN.6/2016/3](#)). Rather than being gender-neutral, fiscal policies can have a significant influence on reducing inequalities, including gender inequality, as they play a role in redistributing resources through progressive tax systems and investments in services, infrastructure and social protection.⁴ Indeed, this objective for economic policy is central to Goal 10 in the 2030 Agenda.

¹⁰ Matthew Amengual and William Milberg, "Economic development and working conditions in export processing zones: a survey of trends", Working paper, No. 3 (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2008).

38. In order to create an enabling environment for gender equality and the empowerment of women, several countries have reported prioritizing spending on social policies. As a promising approach, Senegal's economic policy has an explicit focus on reducing social inequality, including gender inequality. Other countries have increased investments in social protection (Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Jamaica), universal pensions (Argentina) and universal health care and universal education (Cuba). Efforts to strengthen the enabling environment could be accelerated by Member States designing economic and social policies in a complementary manner with the specific objective of achieving gender equality and realizing human rights.⁴

C. Maximizing investments in gender equality and the empowerment of women

39. The agreed conclusions call for increased investments, including action to increase resources for gender equality through both domestic resource mobilization and official development assistance (ODA), to fulfil ODA commitments, to institutionalize gender-responsive budgeting, to cost national action plans on gender equality so as to ensure their implementation and to increase funding for women's organizations.

40. The lack of resources dedicated to implementing the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls emerged as a key challenge over the past decade, particularly in the context of the 2008 economic crisis. As well as the lack of resources for specific spending on gender equality policies, the low levels of resources allocated to sectors such as social protection, health, education and water and sanitation continue to pose significant obstacles for achieving gender equality. Analysis based on national budgets of public expenditure in 55 countries in sectors relevant for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (in the areas of agriculture, education, environment, gender, health, social protection and water and sanitation) showed that despite an initial period of increased spending in 2008-2009, spending fell as a percentage of GDP or total expenditure in almost all areas and remained stagnant in one area (water and sanitation), across the majority of countries.¹¹ With the more ambitious 2030 Agenda, the need to mobilize adequate resources for implementation is even more pressing.

41. The 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development have placed emphasis on the role of domestic resource mobilization as well as the continuing importance of ODA, particularly for the least developed countries. Macroeconomic policies, including tax policy, government expenditures and debt management, directly affect the level of resources that are available to achieve gender equality. Additional domestic resources can be mobilized by improving the efficiency of revenue collection, broadening the range of taxes used to generate

¹¹ Debbie Budlender, Matthew Martin and Richard Watts, "Tracking and analysing MDG-related and gender-responsive spending during the global recession: methods and data sources", paper presented at the expert group meeting for the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Mexico City, 2013.

revenues, including by requiring corporations to pay their fair share, and borrowing to finance investments that have significant social and economic returns.¹²

42. To monitor the allocation of resources for gender equality, gender-responsive budgeting is the most common approach used by governments to scrutinize the allocation of public resources. In some countries (Albania and Austria), the commitment to gender-responsive budgeting is inscribed in law. Countries have institutionalized gender-responsive budgeting using multiple approaches, including training (Colombia), inter-agency structures (Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Nepal and Togo) and participatory processes (Senegal). Limited information was provided on the extent to which gender-responsive budgeting processes resulted in increased or reprioritized resources for gender equality.

43. Another path taken by countries (Australia, Finland, Norway and Spain) is to require a regular gender analysis of budgets. The Philippines has a requirement of 5 per cent of government expenditure being allocated towards gender and development, and Djibouti has a specific budget for gender equality across several ministries. Some countries report increasing resources for gender equality (Argentina and Mexico) while others recognize the need to do so but are limited in their capacity to undertake it (Jamaica).

44. In an effort to ring-fence resources, countries have set up specific funds for gender equality (Peru) or allocated funds to particular issues, for example women, peace and security (Austria), funds for women's civil society organizations (Bosnia and Herzegovina), violence against women (Georgia) and women's economic empowerment (Sri Lanka). Kenya has introduced an innovative approach, with a requirement that 30 per cent of public procurement be from businesses owned by women, youth and people with disabilities. Some countries (Islamic Republic of Iran) are also pursuing partnerships with the private sector to increase resources for gender equality.

45. Several countries report increased tracking of ODA for gender equality (Australia, Austria, Japan, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland), as well as aligning those funds to the priorities of the 2030 Agenda, with a focus on Sustainable Development Goal 5 and the gender-sensitive targets across other Sustainable Development Goals.

D. Strengthening the evidence-base for gender equality and the empowerment of women

46. The agreed conclusions call for action to improve the collection, analysis, dissemination and use of gender statistics and disaggregated data, to collect data on the minimum set of gender indicators and violence against women indicators, to develop and enhance standards in key areas and to improve national monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls.

¹² Stephanie Seguino, "Financing for gender equality in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals", UN-Women Discussion Paper Series, No. 11 (New York, UN-Women, 2016).

47. Data and statistics are indispensable tools for informing policies, assessing their impact and ensuring accountability. Given the monitoring requirements of the 2030 Agenda, the need to produce relevant and quality gender-sensitive indicators to monitor progress is now an urgent priority. Significant gaps remain in many areas of gender statistics. For instance, only three of the indicators to monitor Goal 5 have international standards to define statistical concepts and methodologies and adequate country coverage to monitor progress globally. As seen with the Millennium Development Goals, targets for which data are lacking are likely to not be prioritized. The demand for better statistics to monitor the Sustainable Development Goals puts significant pressure on national governments, signalling the need for increased political will and technical and financial support.¹³

48. Most countries have reported advancing their gender statistics work, with many producing regular reports based on a set of gender indicators, which in some cases are aligned with global frameworks such as the Beijing Platform for Action. Data collection is commonly highlighted as a key component of gender equality action plans with specific budget allocations. Countries' plans to address data gaps and improve gender statistics tend to be aligned with their existing national action plans for gender equality. However, in the context of data collection, only some countries highlight their intentions to develop national implementation plans and monitor the Sustainable Development Goals (for example, Cuba).

49. The 2030 Agenda underscores the importance of disaggregated data. Member States are making efforts to improve disaggregated data collection methods to better identify and address multiple forms of discrimination, for example, Albania's focus on Roma and other ethnic minorities, women with disabilities and lesbian, bisexual and trans women; Australia's focus on people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and women with disabilities; Finland's focus on migrants and refugees; Jamaica's focus on older women, women with disabilities and women living with HIV and AIDS; and Norway's focus on the development of indicators for all grounds of discrimination.

50. Some governments are providing technical and financial capacity-building to their statistical systems by, for instance, appointing new gender focal points and gender statistics coordinators in their national statistical offices (Jamaica and Norway), through newly established inter-agency committees on gender statistics (the Philippines) and internal working groups (Colombia and Cuba), and by fostering collaborations between the national statistical office and gender equality institute (Spain).

51. Member States have taken steps to develop and enhance standards and methodologies to measure gender inequality. Albania, Italy, Mexico, the Philippines, Paraguay, Peru, Spain and Sri Lanka are all prioritizing surveys on violence against women and Argentina piloted a new perception survey on the incidence of different types of violence against women in intimate relationships. Following increased international recognition of the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work on women and girls, and in the light of Sustainable Development Goal

¹³ See UN-Women, information on the programme for better gender statistics for evidence-based localization of the Sustainable Development Goals, May 2016. Available from <http://unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/programme-and-technical-assistance>.

target 5.4 on recognizing and valuing this work, some countries are improving time-use data collection (Kenya, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and the Philippines).

52. Other countries are enhancing data collection capacities regarding women's assets and entrepreneurship (Georgia), femicide (Argentina), and rural and tribal women (Islamic Republic of Iran). Few Member States have highlighted data collection on women's participation at all levels of decision-making (for example, Paraguay). Many have demonstrated how their data work is aligned with global frameworks more broadly, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Australia), through online portals and surveys that measure progress against the Beijing Platform for Action (Greece and Jamaica), and most recently regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (Kenya, the Philippines and Switzerland). Few governments acknowledge challenges in capacities to enhance standards and methodologies and the need to invest more attention (for example, Burkina Faso).

53. Many Member States produce regular reports and gender equality indexes (Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Finland, Georgia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kenya, Lithuania, Spain and Sweden), in many cases on a number of key areas, including families, childcare, violence against women, employment and politics (Djibouti and Switzerland), and specific areas, like Australia's new profile of women business operators. Electronic database systems, portals and software tools are being established across countries to evaluate efforts to advance gender equality, including some on such specific areas as violence against women (Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Italy, Peru and Spain). Togo has launched a national gender equality planning and monitoring tool, based on the African Gender and Development Index, and Lithuania launched an electronic map of gender statistics at the local level, looking at the fields of employment, health, education and entrepreneurship.

E. Ensuring women's participation and leadership at all levels and strengthening accountability

54. The agreed conclusions emphasize the importance of women's participation and leadership at all levels and strengthening accountability for effective implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, which remains equally pertinent for the period of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In order to facilitate this ambition, the agreed conclusions call for action by Member States to ensure women's participation and leadership in all fields and at all levels, including through temporary special measures, and to ensure the participation of women's organizations in the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. They highlight the importance of accountability measures for the achievement of gender equality.

55. Women's equal public and political participation and leadership at all levels is critical to sustainable development. However, women's participation and leadership in political and economic decision-making processes remain at very low levels across all regions, whether in local, national or global decision-making forums. General Assembly resolution [66/130](#) on women and political participation notes that women's marginalization from the political sphere is often a result of discriminatory

laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women. Governments acknowledge such challenges (Burkina Faso), including the persistence of cultural constraints that limit women's access to higher education, property and participation in public decision-making (Togo). Despite these long-standing concerns, Member States recognize the potential for closing such gaps as women gain higher education and social norms and practices change (for example, Sri Lanka).

56. Member State action to ensure women's participation in public and private life has primarily focused on quotas and other affirmative action measures. The vast majority of Member States that provided responses have installed mandatory or voluntary parliamentary and/or local level quotas.¹⁴ The increasing focus on women's representation at the local level is promising, as it will be a new dimension of women's representation tracked by the Sustainable Development Goals. In a few cases, quotas and special measures have been introduced to increase representation in senior positions in the private sector (Italy and Sweden). The introduction of financial incentives for political parties with high percentages of female candidates has had limited success in Georgia, whereas in Mexico, the move from a quota to a legal requirement for political parties to ensure gender parity in nominations at the federal and local levels has helped boost women's political representation. Through the use of quotas in Senegal, gender parity has almost been achieved at the national and local levels. Sweden has achieved gender parity in the public sector. Going a step further to address multiple forms of discrimination in public participation, Kenya has drafted a new bill on affirmative action measures aimed at increasing the representation of women, as well as of youth, people with disabilities, minorities and other marginalized groups.

57. In addition to quotas and other affirmative action measures, Member States have demonstrated many examples of action taken to support the participation of women in decision-making processes. Several governments are adopting new national action plans that aim to increase women's political participation (Australia, Paraguay, Peru and Togo). Paraguay has established a department for addressing the participation of indigenous women, to promote their participation in public policy, and also conducted a nationwide campaign to encourage greater political representation of women in elected positions and municipal elections.

58. The establishment of national gender equality councils (Albania, Argentina and Australia) and consultative dialogues with election committees (the Philippines) are proving effective in supporting female candidates and politicians and allocating spaces for women to influence decision-making equally. The establishment of Islamic councils of cities and villages in the Islamic Republic of Iran was introduced as a strategy to increase women's participation at the local level. Lithuania has established a network of women politicians and women's organizations in all regions that undertake information campaigns, mainly with a focus on economic decision-making. Such actions to create supportive spaces for women in public life are particularly critical given that some countries still report

¹⁴ Albania, Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Lithuania, Nepal, Norway, Peru, Poland, Senegal, Spain and Sri Lanka, and such measures are pending in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Greece and Jamaica.

high numbers of cases of political harassment in female candidates' participation in regional and municipal elections (for example, Peru).

59. In order to increase women's participation at the highest levels in the private sector, Norway has established a database that identifies qualified women to fill board seats. Some promising capacity-building programmes are also emerging across regions, including public and private sector leadership, local governance and civil society mobilization training for women (Greece, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Nepal, Norway, the Philippines and Spain), and in several cases targeting marginalized women (Azerbaijan and Nepal). Sweden has formed a national expert group on gender equality in academia to address male predominance in this field and has adopted recruitment objectives to be achieved by 2017.

60. In the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, some countries are taking steps to ensure women's involvement in working groups to design national implementation plans, including with civil society organizations (Finland and Jamaica). One promising practice from the Philippines was a series of participatory workshops to localize the 2030 Agenda, involving women's organizations. Cuba has taken a gender mainstreaming approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals by focusing on increasing women's participation and leadership in environmental conservation, risk management and disaster prevention. Open, inclusive and participatory structures where civil society, including women's organizations, can shape and influence priorities and policies are critical for ensuring that gender equality features as a priority, as implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals accelerates.

61. Recognizing the commitment to support women's equal political participation in all contexts, including in times of peace and conflict, several Member States are taking action to promote women's roles and leadership in humanitarian action, including in conflict prevention and efforts to ensure peace and security (Colombia and Sweden).

V. Conclusions, recommendations and future priorities

62. Member States have taken important steps to implement the wide-ranging actions of the agreed conclusions of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Key lessons from the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals have been prioritized in the early stages of the Sustainable Development Goals, such as addressing gender equality concerns beyond the targets of the Millennium Development Goals, mainstreaming gender equality across all policy areas and investing in gender statistics to monitor progress. However, overall implementation of the agreed conclusions has been uneven across the recommendations, with limited focus on the effectiveness of actions.

63. Looking forward to accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, a comprehensive approach to implementation should be pursued that recognizes the synergies and interdependence between different dimensions of gender equality and addresses the links between Goal 5 and all other Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, greater effort is needed to address gender equality in the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

64. Governments should expand legal reform to implement a full range of measures to achieve substantive equality for women, focusing on achieving equality of outcomes. National implementation should build on the lessons from the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action. As a practical step, governments should draw on the concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women as well as their reviews of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in developing implementation plans for the 2030 Agenda and previous agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women.

65. Multiple and intersecting discrimination emerges as a focus for governments and is particularly pertinent for ensuring no one is left behind in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. That commitment in the 2030 Agenda emphasizes that all goals and targets should be met for all nations, all peoples and all segments of society. Alongside Goal 10, which has a focus on inequalities, the emphasis on reaching the most marginalized groups and tackling inequalities of different kinds is a distinct feature of the 2030 Agenda.

66. Much of the focus of Member States' actions to address multiple forms of discrimination against women has been on data disaggregation, legal protections or specific programmes targeted to different groups of women. Those strategies are promising and important, however, greater focus is needed on policies that address the structural, power and political dynamics that push particular groups further behind and deepen inequalities.¹⁵ Such policy areas include macroeconomic frameworks, trade and investment policies, labour policies, redistributive policies, including universal social protection and services, as well as anti-discrimination legislation.¹⁶ Rather than pursuing targeted policies, such as specific social transfers or services for particular groups, universal and targeted policy measures can work in tandem to ensure access for groups that have been historically excluded while also building universal health or education systems that are collectively financed and used by all social groups.¹⁷

67. While governments are increasingly adopting gender-responsive budgeting to allocate resources and monitor public expenditure on gender equality, ensuring adequate resources for implementing gender equality commitments in the 2030 Agenda presents an immense challenge, particularly for developing countries. In 2014, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development estimated that developing countries face an annual investment gap of \$2.5 trillion in sectors relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals. The lack of adequate resources for the implementation of national action plans on gender equality and other gender equality policies is a significant challenge across all countries, irrespective of the

¹⁵ See Valerie Esquivel, "Power and the Sustainable Development Goals: a feminist analysis", *Gender and Development*, vol. 24, No. 1 (March 2016), pp. 9-23, and Shahra Razavi, "The 2030 Agenda: challenges of implementation to attain gender equality and women's rights", *ibid.*, pp. 25-41.

¹⁶ Naila Kabeer, *Can the MDGs provide a pathway to social justice? The challenge of intersecting inequalities* (New York, United Nations Development Programme, 2010).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* See also Thandika Mkandawire, "Targeting and universalism in poverty reduction", Social Policy and Development Programme Paper, No. 23 (Geneva, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2005).

level of development. While gender-responsive budgeting can support the effective and efficient allocation and spending of available resources for women and girls, the impact of such allocations will be limited when overall budgets for gender equality policies and the provision of services, social protection and infrastructure are grossly inadequate.

68. Greater attention is urgently needed on strategies and measures to mobilize additional resources for gender equality, including through progressive income and wealth taxes and closing tax loopholes. Investments need to be prioritized across all sectors, including social protection, infrastructure, agriculture, health, education, justice, care services and water and sanitation. Gender equality-focused ODA remains important, particularly for developing countries, but other avenues of global resource mobilization, including global taxes, can also play a role.

69. The 2030 Agenda places a strong emphasis on national ownership and, as such, accountability for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals lies primarily at the national level. The responses from Member States were limited in providing information on accountability mechanisms related to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. From a gender perspective, gender mainstreaming was confirmed as a key strategy employed by governments to ensure that gender equality commitments are addressed across all policy areas, and dovetails with the call for systematic gender mainstreaming in implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Yet, there was insufficient information available on how gender perspectives are integrated into national sustainable development strategies and plans. At the same time, key institutions and mechanisms for promoting gender equality, such as national gender equality mechanisms and national human rights institutions, remain underresourced. Governments must strengthen gender equality mechanisms and make gender equality a priority in setting up institutions, structures and whole-of-government approaches for implementing and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals. This also includes greater investments in gender statistics to ensure that progress for women and girls can be effectively monitored.

70. Women's organizations will play a critical role in ensuring that global commitments are translated into national priorities. Comparative research on 70 countries over four decades recognizes the role of autonomous feminist organizations in advancing women's rights as the most critical factor in the implementation of gender equality policies.¹⁸ Yet there are constraints on the ability of civil society to hold governments accountable, including through widespread threats and restrictions.¹⁹ It will be crucial to enable spaces for the effective participation of women's civil society organizations in all aspects of decision-making related to the implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals.

71. The Sustainable Development Goals represent a bold and comprehensive agenda for achieving human rights, peace and security and sustainable development, with gender equality at its core. Turning those commitments into results requires

¹⁸ Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon, "The civic origins of progressive policy change: combating violence against women in global perspective, 1975-2005", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 106, No. 3 (August 2012), pp. 548-569.

¹⁹ CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, *State of Civil Society Report 2016* (executive summary) (Johannesburg, 2016).

renewed commitment, increased resources, creativity and policy innovation, as a matter of priority. The agreed conclusions of the fifty-eighth session provide a foundational set of actions to support all stakeholders in such efforts. Together with the Political Declaration adopted at the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and its six implementation strategies as part of the 20-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (resolution 59/1 of the Commission) and the agreed conclusions of the sixtieth session of the Commission, there is a clear road map for gender-responsive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.²⁰ States should urgently accelerate implementation efforts to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda of creating an equal world where women and girls are empowered and enjoy their human rights.

²⁰ UN-Women, *Driving the Gender-responsive Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York, 2016).